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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the feasibility of compulsory summer reading programs for students at risk in Virgina school divisions were surveyed concerning their summer school offerings. Remedial summer school enrollment statewide was analyzed. Structured interviews with staff responsible for administration of summer reading programs from 16 selected Virginia school divisions were conducted. A review of state and local regulations related to such programs was undertaken. Results indicated that: (1) a majority of Virginia school divisions used summer programs for remediation and other purposes; (2) program enrollment remained voluntary, yet a high percentage of eligible students enrolled statewide; (3) participation and attendance varied among school divisions; (4) many school divisions offer reading programs at no cost and provide transportation for students at risk; (5) summer reading programs frequently provided teachers and students the opportunity to experience new instructional methods; (6) no conclusions were drawn regarding the academic benefits of summer reading programs; and (7) instructional quality would be significantly compromised in the absence of state funding. Recommendations include that: summer programs for students at risk should continue to be supported at the state and local level; funding for increased instructional time for students at risk should be continued and expanded where appropriate; and the use of summer programs as a staff development opportunity should be supported. (One figure of data is included; the text of House Joint Resolution 423, and interview findings related to incentives and barriers to attendance and instructional methods used in summer programs are attached.) (RS)

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REPORT OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ON

The Study of Summer Reading Programs in Response to House Joint Resolution 423

TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA

HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 24

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
1992

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PREFACE

House Joint Resolution 423, approved by the 1991 Virginia General Assembly, requested the Board of Education's Focus Group on Teaching and Learning to study the feasibility of compulsory summer reading programs for students in grades one through three who score in the bottom quartile on standardized tests.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Delegate Jackie Stump introduced House Joint Resolution 423 in response to the concerns expressed by certain local school officials regarding the availability of an enrollment in reading programs during summer school. The Resolution directed the Board of Education to study the feasibility of compulsory summer reading programs for students who score in the bottom quartile on standardized tests in grades one through three.

Due to the relationship between summer school programs and the Board of Education's study of Instructional Time and Student Learning, this study was incorporated into the report entitled **Instructional Time and Student Learning: A Study of the School Calendar and Instructional Time**, and detailed information can be found in that report.

The vast majority of Virginia local school divisions offer summer school programs for students requiring additional assistance in reading instruction. Many of these divisions rely on state funding to support these programs. Summer school programs vary widely in terms of eligibility requirements, student enrollment, and the length of programs. A number of local school divisions utilize a curriculum focused on enhancement of reading comprehension and written language skills in a natural

language learning environment. It is recommended that summer school programs be targeted as one important vehicle for meeting the need for increased instructional time for students requiring additional reading instruction. However, it is not recommended that such programs be mandated. Rather, local school boards should continue to have the flexibility to exercise all options for increasing instructional time to meet the needs of these students. It is recommended that funding for increased instructional time for students requiring additional reading instruction be continued and expanded when possible. It is further recommended that summer school programs be supported as staff development opportunities for teachers, allowing teachers to enhance their familiarity with alternative techniques for instruction and classroom management.

BACKGROUND

Summer school programs in Virginia, as in the rest of the United States, have traditionally been offered for the purposes of remediation, enrichment, acceleration, and promotion. These programs are generally offered at a cost to parents, excluding those federally mandated programs (compulsory education and special education). The Department of Education has provided funding for remedial summer programs for students performing at the bottom quartile on standardized tests since the 1988-89 school year.

Methodology: The purpose of this study, to investigate the feasibility of compulsory summer reading programs for students at risk, is directly related to the allocation of adequate time to meet student learning needs. This issue is the focus of the Department of Education's analysis of instructional time and student learning, completed for the Board of Education, in response to a request from the Secretary of Education. As a result, this study was incorporated into **Instructional Time and Student Learning: A Study of the School Calendar and Instructional Time**. Further details regarding the findings and recommendations which relate summer reading programs to the larger issues of instructional time and student learning can be found in that report.

A team of professionals from the Department of Education and a local school division completed this study for the Board of Education. The team utilized the following methods in completion of the study:

- a survey of current summer school offerings, including reading programs, in Virginia school divisions (96 percent response rate);
- an analysis of remedial summer school enrollment statewide;
- structured interviews with staff responsible for administration of summer reading programs from 16 selected Virginia school divisions offering summer reading programs at no cost (eight counties and eight cities)[1]; and,
- a review of Code of Virginia and Board of Education regulations related to summer school and remedial programs.

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1 Accomack, Albemarle, Alexandria, Bedford, Charlottesville, Fredericksburg, Galax, Hanover, King George, Montgomery, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Prince William, Richmond City, Roanoke, Tazewell

VIRGINIA PRACTICE

Legal Authority: The Standards of Quality mandate that students whose scores are in the bottom quartile on the Virginia State Assessment Program Tests shall be required to take special remedial programs which may include attendance in public summer school sessions. The division superintendent is authorized to require attendance of such students in summer school sessions, without charging those students tuition. State funds shall be provided for summer remediation programs, as set forth in the Appropriation Act, based upon the number of students attending (Code of Virginia §22.1-253.13:1.)

The Department of Education has administered state funding for remedial programs since 1988-89. The state allows considerable local flexibility in the development and administration of summer remedial programs.

The Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia, (1988) mandate that summer school programs shall be equal in quality to programs offered during the regular school term (Standard C, Criteria 4).

Local School Division Survey: According to a survey of Virginia school divisions, approximately 93 percent offered summer school programs for academic purposes at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels in 1991 (Figure I). Among those divisions offering summer school, the most commonly offered programs were

for reading remediation at the elementary (90%) and middle school (85%) levels, and for acceleration (60%) and promotion (50%) at the secondary level. A review of results reveals that most Virginia school divisions provide summer reading programs, suggesting that local education officials recognize the value of providing additional time for low performing students in reading instruction. The survey did not obtain information on the qualitative or programmatic aspects of the summer school courses. Figure I shows the frequency and general type of summer school programs offered for the 1990-91 school year.

FIGURE I.
SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAMS OFFERED IN VIRGINIA SCHOOL DIVISIONS
(for the 1990-91 school year)

Type of summer school program	School level		
	Elementary n=115	Middle n=107	Secondary n=115
Academic Enrichment	57.3%	47.6%	30.4%
Promotion	13.9%	41.1%	50.4%
Acceleration	N/A	19.6%	60.0%
Remediation-Reading	90.4%	85.0%	30.4%
Remediation-Other	69.5%	74.7%	45.2%
Special Education	32.1%	27.1%	22.6%
English as a Second Language	< 1%	< 1%	< 1%
Other	< 1%	< 1%	< 1%

Source: DOE analysis of school division survey, July 1991.

In 1990-91, school divisions estimated that 40,569 students, grades K through 12 would enroll in summer remedial programs, based upon their established eligibility criteria. According to local school division reports, 92 percent (37,265) of eligible students enrolled in summer remedial programs.

Structured Interviews: School administrators interviewed indicated that summer reading programs were designed to meet the needs of students who demonstrated significant need for additional reading instruction. Student selection criteria varied widely, ranging from performance in the bottom quartile on the Virginia State Assessment Program to teacher referral, based upon student performance on criterion-referenced teacher-made tests. Remedial programs were offered to those students who met state eligibility requirements. Many divisions offered remedial programs to additional students who met local school division eligibility requirements.

While no school division made summer school attendance compulsory for targeted students, all school divisions developed programs with incentives for those students most in need of instruction. Despite the creativity of school administrators in attracting students, enrollment and attendance varied among divisions. In those divisions where administrators were interviewed, typically 50 - 75% of eligible students enrolled in programs, with a range of from less than 25% to greater than 75% of eligible students. Local officials cited the provision of free transportation as a vital component in ensuring student enrollment. Summer school reading programs also varied considerably in length. Some programs were as short as two weeks and others as long as six weeks. Typically, programs lasted three to four hours per day.

Local school divisions appeared to value a lower teacher pupil ratio in summer reading programs, offering lower ratios in the summer than typically available during the school year (generally 1:10 to 1:15). Many programs offered one-to-one instruction for students for part of the instruction.

Local divisions frequently viewed summer reading programs as an opportunity to provide student instruction and teacher experience in whole language reading approaches. The focus was generally on meaningful application of reading skills, rather than drills and skill building. Appendix B provides futher information of the summer reading programs.

Summer reading programs in 1991 were funded, using both local and state dollars. The degree of reliance on state funding varied widely among school divisions, and, in the case of schools using school-based management, from school to school. State and local educators indicated that current state funding is inadequate to provide appropriate summer school programs for all eligible students.

The need for state funding was reported to be critical by local authorities. Although a number of school divisions support summer reading programs with local funds, state monies served as the basis of programs in many localities. A number of school officials indicated that their ability to adequately plan for programs was significantly hampered by the late notice of funding availability (as necessitated by the timing of the Governor's approval of the Commonwealth's budget). Most divisions reported that, in the absence of state funding, programs would be drastically altered (fewer students, shorter programs, increased class sizes), potentially compromising

the value of the summer reading programs. Despite the fact that summer reading programs have been available to students for many years in certain areas of the state, there is little evidence about the effectiveness of these programs. Data has not been kept regarding the impact of the summer program on the student's later reading performance. Many localities did report a high degree of student, teacher and parent satisfaction with the summper programs, as obtained through the use of surveys.

Local school officials expressed a high degree of concern for the needs of students at risk for reading development. They cited summer school programs as one valuable option for providing the necessary increase in allocated instructional time for these students. While most local officials favor the current state practice of providing fiscal incentives for enrollment of students, most do not favor mandating student attendance. Educators recognize the negative implications of such a mandate, believing that students and parents' perceptions of the mandates may adversely impact on student motivation and interest.

CONCLUSIONS

A majority of Virginia school divisions used summer school programs for remediation, enrichment, acceleration and promotion purposes. Program enrollment remains voluntary; yet a high percentage of eligible students enrolled statewide. Participation and attendance varied among school divisions. A large number of school divisions offer reading programs at no cost and provide transportation to encourage enrollment on the part of students at risk.

Virginia summer school reading programs frequently provide the opportunity for teachers and students to experience new instructional methods. The combination of smaller classes and new approaches often serve to better meet the need for increased reading instruction for students at risk. Unfortunately, no conclusion can be drawn regarding either short or long-term academic benefits of summer reading programs, as few divisions evaluate these programs.

State funding for summer reading programs is essential to ensure their availability. In the absence of state funding, most localities indicated that program quality would be significantly compromised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A review of the findings leads to the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Summer school programs for students at risk should continue to be supported at the state and local level. It is not recommended, however, that such programs be mandated. At present, most school divisions offer summer remedial programs and a high percentage of eligible students enroll. In addition, the punitive nature of a mandate requiring summer school for students who do not perform at a given level on achievement tests may have a negative effect on these students who are already at risk. Mandating participation in summer reading programs would require enforcement at the local level; implementation of such enforcement policies would prove difficult, if not impossible, as well as place additional demands on already limited resources. Lastly, without sufficient funding, establishment of a mandate places undue fiscal responsibility on local school divisions.

Local school boards should continue to exercise options for increasing instructional time to meet the learning needs for students at risk for reading development. The Department of Education should continue to provide technical assistance and information to school divisions investigating options and developing programs.

Recommendation 2: Funding for increased instructional time for students at risk should be continued and expanded where appropriate. Summer reading programs should continue to be supported with other programs designed to increase allocated instructional time for students at risk. Adequate time should be given to program planning, using data on the students' learning to match programs to students' needs. School divisions should document the impact of these programs on student learning. The Department of Education should provide program evaluation in technical assistance to local school divisions.

Recommendation 3: The Department of Education and local school divisions should support the use of summer school programs as a staff development opportunity for teachers. Quality of instruction can be enhanced by providing teachers with the opportunity to use alternative and innovative instructional techniques. Students who have not learned successfully with traditional methods frequently benefit from such a laboratory approach.

APPENDIX A

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 423

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA--1991 SESSION

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 423

Requesting the Department of Education to include within the Board of Education's Focus Group on Teaching and Learning a study of the feasibility of compulsory summer reading programs for students in grades one through three who score in the bottom quartile on standardized tests.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 22, 1991
Agreed to by the Senate, February 21, 1991

WHEREAS, governmental studies have revealed that over 20 million adults are functionally illiterate in America and another 39 million are only marginally literate; and

WHEREAS, approximately 13 percent of all 17 year-olds in the U.S. can be considered functionally illiterate; and

WHEREAS, functional illiteracy among minority youth may be as high as 40 percent; and

WHEREAS, the costs of illiteracy are staggering in terms of real dollar costs and human suffering; and

WHEREAS, children who cannot read and write fall behind their classmates and drop out of school at alarming rates; and

WHEREAS, the Governor's Commission on Excellence in Education strongly recommended remedial education programs for children who lack basic literacy skills; and

WHEREAS, remedial programs designed to reward achievement and promote feelings of self-worth can be effectively delivered in summer school; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Education be requested to include within the Board of Education's Focus Group on Teaching and Learning a study of the feasibility of requiring local school divisions to provide compulsory summer reading programs for students in grades one through three who score in the bottom quartile on standardized tests.

The Department of Education shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1992 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures for the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

APPENDIX B

INCENTIVES

INTERVIEW FINDINGS:
ELEMENTARY SUMMER READING PROGRAMS
SELECTED VIRGINIA LEAS
Incentives and Barriers to Attendance

INCENTIVES	BARRIERS
o no cost to parents o free transportation o carpool information provided or carpools arranged if systemwide transportation not provided o contact with parents before enrollment: e.g. letters, conferences, workshops, phone calls o contact with parents during summer school: e.g. workshops for parents during classes o letter of invitation sent to every child o program offered in multiple locations, allowing parents to choose most convenient location o "camp" atmosphere: e.g. adventure camp, travel camp; themes carried through camp o "summer school cash" bonus for attendance that could be used at a program function o business involvement through donations allowing special activities such as pizza, prizes... o summer school attendance ensured promotion	• competition from community summer programs that offered non academic activities • some families did not share the implicit value of enrollment in summer programs • students with low success in school did not want to risk the possibility of continued experience of low success in school over the summer • lack of transportation or funding for transportation • distance required for travel to attend programs that were offered at centralized locations rather than home school

INTERVIEW FINDINGS:
ELEMENTARY SUMMER READING PROGRAMS
SELECTED VIRGINIA LEAS
Instructional Methods Used in Summer Programs

Methods Reported
■ Whole Language ■ Oral Presentation ■ Literature Based Reading Programs ■ Meaningful Application of Reading ■ Written Language Activities ■ Project Based Approach ■ Cooperative Learning ■ Computer Usage ■ Enrichment - e.g. Field trips, Co-Curricular Activities ■ Individualized Instruction ■ Tutorial Experience ■ Basic Remedial Approaches ■ High Interest, Low Vocabulary Books ■ Use of Community Resources (Storyteller, Musicians, Museums, Foster Grandparents) ■ General Avoidance of Worksheets, Drills and Skill Building ■ Affiliation with Universities offering Summer Practicums in Reading, Enabling Diagnostic 1-1 Instruction for Part of The Program